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News

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Fish and Wildlife Service Announces it Will Begin Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Update to 1988 Plan Will Include a Wilderness Review

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today that the Service is beginning an update of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's 22 year-old Comprehensive Conservation Plan that will establish goals and objectives and include wilderness and wild and scenic river reviews. A comprehensive conservation plan is required for each national wildlife refuge, guides stewardship of the refuge and is normally updated every 15 years.

The planning process will begin with public meetings to discuss issues and future goals for stewardship of the Arctic Refuge. The Service will meet with the public this April and May in the following communities in Alaska: Anchorage, Arctic Village, Fairbanks, Fort Yukon, Kaktovik, and Venetie. There will also be a public meeting in Washington DC on May 4, 2010. Dates, times, and locations of the other meetings will be announced locally in advance. The meetings will help the Service identify issues and draft alternatives for future stewardship of the refuge. After evaluating public comments, the Service will release a draft plan for public review and comment in February 2011. Based upon a thorough review of comments, the Service will issue the final plan and record of decision in April 2012.

As part of the planning process for Alaska refuges, the Service may inventory, study, and possibly propose areas suitable for wilderness within the National Wilderness Preservation System. Wilderness areas preserve a landscape's natural conditions for the benefit and use of the American people. A wilderness area recommendation by the Service is forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for consideration. Any new wilderness designation requires Congressional approval.

"The comprehensive conservation planning process gives the Service the opportunity to evaluate the needs of each refuge and the resources it serves, and to create a road map for meeting those needs. For this process to be complete, the leadership of every refuge should have the opportunity to work with partners and the public to determine if any lands are appropriate for inclusion in the wilderness system," said Alaska Regional Director Geoffrey L. Haskett.

"No decision has yet been made about the status of any lands in the refuge not currently designated as wilderness. If any lands are recommended for wilderness designation, they would be identified and vetted through extensive public consultation and review as part of the plan revision process and ultimately require congressional approval," said Haskett. "The Refuge's current CCP is more than 20 years old, and much has changed since then. New laws and policies have been enacted, climate change

has emerged as a concern, the Dalton Highway has opened to the public, and visitor use patterns have changed.”

The Service had postponed wilderness reviews of Alaska refuges as it awaited finalization of national refuge wilderness stewardship policy. This policy, finalized in November 2008, requires wilderness reviews for refuges outside of Alaska and provides the option for wilderness reviews for refuges within Alaska. The Service Director directed that wilderness reviews be included for Alaska refuges. Additional information about the planning process for Arctic Refuge is posted at <http://arctic.fws.gov/ccp.htm>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

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